

INSIGHTS FROM ASSESSMENTS OF EXPERIENTIAL CIVICS INITIATIVES

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Thank you all for having me. The purpose of this session is to help you think about how you might know if you have successful– for example, how would you know that the experiential civics program you have decided to tackle or implement actually “worked”...

POP QUIZ...

If I gave you a 10 question citizenship test right now, how do you think you would do?

- I would get 9/10 questions correct
- I'd at least pass with a 7/10
- I might be able to get 5/10
- I don't think I would get half of the questions correct

EXISTING ASSESSMENTS

- **Citizenship Test**
- **NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress)**
 - **24% of students at proficiency (2018)**
 - knowledge, intellectual and participatory skills, and civic dispositions
- **AP US Government & Politics Exam**
 - Graded on a “curve” – normal distribution

The USCIS citizenship test is one of the existing assessments of the successfulness of civic requirements. Utah currently has a civics graduation requirement that basically meets the citizenship test standard (1). Many other states (some 37) also have a similar requirement... YET... (2) on the NAEP; so there is a disconnect between passing one test and the other? It's curious because they test very similar things. What we know about the citizenship test (as perhaps some of you in the room will know) is it's basically a flashcard test—meaning you can memorize a bunch of the information, but then forget it.

Another existing exam is the AP US gov & pol exam. Some of you might be AP Gov teachers in the room, and you know that this test is more than just memorization, but it's also graded on a curve, so “success” is relative to how well other students in the nation does.

But as you can see, most of these exams have to do with knowledge... and unfortunately a lot of it has to do with how many facts students remember.

KNOWLEDGE IS KEY

Or is it?

- Research shows that knowledge is an important part of political participation (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1998)

...but Knowing doesn't always mean doing, and we definitely want knowledgeable doers

- not people who know but do nothing, nor people who don't know anything and blunder around

Well, knowledge is key (1) or is it, because if knowledge is key, NAEP, the citizenship test, and other standardized tests of knowledge would be enough... (2) research does show that knowledge is an important part of political participation, but it's correlational and not causal, meaning people who are involved in politics or engaged tend to know more---it doesn't mean that knowing more will get you involved. This makes intuitive sense, right? If you play tennis, you will probably keep up with current stats of top-ranked tennis players. Or if you're a basketball fan, you will likely know recent Jazz stats. If you are engaged in an activity, you will likely know a lot about that activity. And vice versa, if you know more, you'd be likely to learn more—assuming you actually connected with it and like it. BUT if you aren't really interested in it, you'd just forget it (3) ultimately, we don't just want citizens who know things but don't follow through (or worse, just know them for a test), nor do we want people constantly doing things that don't know what they're doing.

IF NOT KNOWLEDGE, THEN WHAT?



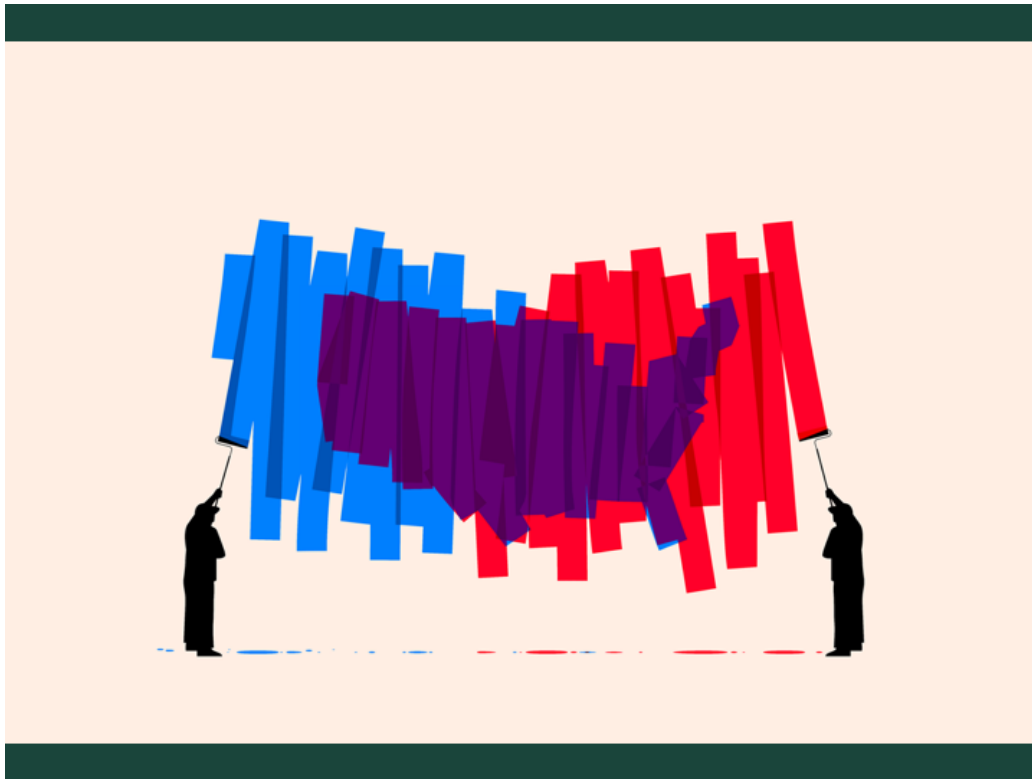
So if not knowledge, the what in terms of assessments?

As a caveat, it's important for me to say here that the goal (in terms of success in civic education) is not for students to act in a particularly partisan way, (1) I bet this is how many of us are feeling about politics in this country right now. And some people might be hesitant to go beyond knowledge because of this. (2) But let me assure you that this is NOT the goal.



What is the goal?...The goal is for students to understand the system and context (knowledge), but also (1) know how to engage as a productive member within that system (participation).

Thinking about current events and issues that we are facing across the nation, the substance of the participation can look different based on your partisan stance or what you believe in, but the mode of participation is likely similar: Vote, petition, join interest groups, organize, protest. And the goals are actually more similar than you might think: fighting for a more just society, a safer community, values and morals (even if we disagree on exactly what those things mean).



But it's important to remember that the goal of civic education is to help students understand the complexities of our diversity and how we can hold those diverse perspectives in a system of governance—not to create democrats/republicans/liberals/conservatives. And that individuals have roles and responsibilities to one another. To that end, we have to find ways to measure civic success beyond knowledge. So how do we measure THAT...if this deep understanding is the goal, how do we know if we have succeeded?

So... if not just knowledge, then what?

IF NOT KNOWLEDGE, THEN WHAT?

What do you think is the **MOST** important measure of civic readiness (please select up to 3)?

- Agency
- Empowerment
- Being open-minded
- Knowledge of government
- Moral values/Character development
- Willingness to engage (voting or otherwise)
- Willingness to volunteerism
- Willingness to uphold the law
- Understanding of politics

I will ask you... WHAT do you think is the most important measure of civic readiness. You will need to use this later in the breakout groups, so please jot down your top 3 answers and reasons why, so you can share in your groups. I'll give you a few minutes. And if it's something not listed, go ahead and write that down too



The ROOTS OF ENGAGED CITIZENSHIP Project

The purpose of this study is to better understand how youth become **good citizens** and identify the developmental roots of active **participation in communities and society.**



The Roots of Engaged Citizenship project is based on the assumption that civic engagement is good for young people's well-being and functioning in other areas of life, and that youth engagement makes our communities and society stronger.

Our Funding Partners





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So now that you have jotted down what you'd like to see. I'll go through some things that researchers in civic education like to measure. This is one example from the Roots of Engaged Citizenship Project, (2) which is a Collaboration between the Search Institute, UCLA, and West Virginia University. Notice that their purpose to understand what helps young people become good citizens. I would say that good citizens is a successful outcome, so what do they measure? (3) typically on self-reported surveys of (4)....

Of course this is just one example from an existing project, there are many others...

OTHER EXAMPLES (TYPICALLY ON SELF-REPORTED SURVEYS)

- Knowledge
- Skills
- Engagement
- Attitude
- Disposition
- Voting
- Volunteering
- Active political and cognitive engagement)
- Interest in politics

Also on self-reported surveys...

Knowledge (do you know how the system worked, works, and can work)

Skill (do you know how to engage productively with the system and one another)

Engagement (what do you actually do)

Attitude (how you feel about politics and political engagement; are you cynical; optimistic?)

Disposition (how likely are you to be tolerant, respectful, and understanding)

Voting (do you vote) – if voting starts early, it creates a lifelong habit.

Also: Voter turnout among Utah youth is some of the worst in the nation. If you want, you can mention a Utah organization, Voterise (will be at our conference), which comes into Utah classrooms to register new voters (can pre-register at age 16).

Volunteering (do you do things that help the community without pay)

Active political and cognitive engagement (do you try to understand what is happening political, from all sides)

WHAT WE DON'T MEASURE

- Success of the project
- Kind of engagement/activity
- How students engage
- Partisanship

It's not about the "right" politics

WHAT ABOUT EXPERIENTIAL CIVICS?

- Knowledge ↑
- Skills ↑
- Engagement ↑
- Attitude/dispositions ↑
- Vote (intention) ↑
- Political affiliation
- Activism
- Nationalists

You've spent the morning talking about what experiential civics can do...and preliminary research shows that What we know from research is that...(1)

Knowledge (2)

Skills (gets students to practice doing, and trying to solve problems together) (3)

Engagement (pique interests and actively engage even if it's in practice) (4)

Attitude/disposition (help them see what is possible—be more tolerant and respectful) (5)

Vote (?) – at least intention seems to be high (6)

What it DOESN'T do: Change students' political affiliations, turn them into ignorant activists, make them docile followers (7; 8; 9)

WHAT ABOUT IN THE CLASS?

- **Knowledge** (test)
 - Do they know the information?
- **Skills** (activity/project)
 - Can they lobby for (or know how to) interests?
- **Transfer** (activity/test)
 - Can they apply what they know to new situations?
- **Critical thinking** (informal/formal assessments)
 - Are they able to see different perspectives and understand complexities?

- Well, knowledge can be tested on exams as usual... do they know it?
- Skills can be seen in activities or projects that you grade. Think about performance assessments, where students are showing you that they know how the process works and that they have the ability to complete that process
- Transfer, what I mean is can they apply this information to something else? I'll talk more about this in a minute, but research shows that deep understanding of something means students can transfer that knowledge to new situations.
- Critical thinking, are they pausing to take the other side? Are they aware (or dismissive) of the complexities?
- These are all things you can measure in a lesson or the classroom. Think about how these things might align with the top civic outcomes you wrote down a few minutes ago.

ONE EXAMPLE OF TRANSFER

Complex Scenario Test (CST)

- Students placed into a role (e.g., lobbyist, member of congress, consultant)
- Given some information about a complex systems-related scenario (e.g., should we track people's phones using GPS)
- Answer how they would answer/approach the question/situation, and be able to explain (using factual information) why.
- Complete the exercise with action plan items.
- You can read more in our Social Education article

So Transfer... I worked on a research project a few years ago at the University of Washington where we wanted to measure how well students were able to transfer knowledge they had about government and politics, because we knew that transfer was a better measure of student understanding than just a test of facts and information.

So in the CST... of course student had to first have knowledge of how the government worked, but we wanted to see what they would do with that knowledge given a real life scenario. So we used real supreme court or district court cases and prompted them to provide their thoughts, which showcased their understanding.

We graded these on a rubric that measured their knowledge as well as their thinking. Think to essay rubrics where students provide evidence and rationale for their answers. Of course these are more cumbersome to grade than 10 question multiple choice quizzes, but if done once a six weeks or quarterly, it will give you a good sense of what students are not only remembering, but how they are thinking with the information they remember.

SMALL GROUPS

Consider what Utah wants to measure:

- In the classroom
 - What kinds of assessments?
- Broadly, district/school
 - What kinds of surveys or indicators?
- Longer term
 - What kinds of data will you look to?

So your turn. Take about 10 minutes to debrief, and we'll come back and I'll try to answer some of your questions

Consider how you want to measure success

Broadly, district/school-wide survey?

School/community projects?

School climate

In the classroom

Complex Scenario Test (get students to solve a what-if scenario)

Basic knowledge/skills

Performance assessments

Classroom climate

Longer term

Voter turnout

Volunteerism

Space for compromise/disagreement